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Reflections

ON THE (6)

Prohibition Act :

WHEREIN

The Necessity, Usefulness and  
Value of that LAW, are Evinc'd  
and Demonstrated.

In ANSWER to a

Letter *on that* Subject,

From a Gentleman concern'd in

TRADE.

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L O N D O N,

Printed in the Year, MDCCVIII.

Reflections

ON THE

Proposition

W. H. E. I. N.

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TRADE

LONDON

Printed by J. B. R. 1741

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# REFLECTIONS

ON THE

## Prohibition Act.

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London, Jan. 10. 1704.

SIR,

**B**Y yours of the first Instant, you require my Opinion about the *Prohibition Act*, in Terms manifestly indicating your Fear and Concern lest we should be deprived of it. I know not what Reasons you may have for such Apprehensions; and perhaps You and I never differ'd more then in the Matter of the present Subject; about which I shall honestly and plainly give you my Thoughts, and handle the Point with that Freedom and Sincerity which the Weight of the Subject deserves, being under no Restriction that I know of to the contrary. To which Purpose I shall lay down the Two following Positions.

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1. That

I. That the Act of Parliament prohibiting the Use of the Manufactured Silks, &c. of *India, China, and Persia*, in this Nation, is one of the happiest and best Laws we enjoy, relating to Trade.

II. That we are not in any Danger of losing it; that is to say, that it is not like to be Repealed; but on the contrary, will stand firm and unshaken to future Ages, notwithstanding the Designs and Attempts of all its Adversaries.

III. That the *Prohibition Act* is one of the happiest and best Laws we enjoy relating to Trade.

To prove this, there is nothing further Necessary then to consider the Circumstance and Condition of the *English Manufactures* for the Space of six or seven Years before and after that Law took Place, and fairly to compare them together; by which the Necessity, as well as the Usefulness of that reasonable Act, will evidently appear, to all unbiafed and unprejudiced Persons.

The Places where these Manufactures, before the late Inundation of *India Goods*, more especially flourished, were *London, Canterbury and Norwich*; together with the Counties of *Essex, Suffolk,*

*Suffolk, Norfolk, Hartford and Cambridge*, whose Employment chiefly consisted in making *Tarn* for *London* and *Norwich*.

As to *London*, the Manufactures were almost lost by the coming in of *East India* Goods, for divers Years before the obtaining of the *Prohibition*; the Tradesman generally undone, whole Streets uninhabited, many of our best Artists left the Kingdom; some went to *Holland*, some to *Ireland*, others to *Scotland*. Those that remain'd were not half employ'd; the rest reduced to the greatest Extremities, of whom many begged their Bread, and were forced to be maintain'd by their Parishes.

And if it fared thus with *London*, it could not be much better with *Norwich*, whose Numerous Families had nothing to depend on, but their own Manufactures, which those of *India* so directly oppose: No wonder therefore if the former sunk, whilst the other prevail'd, and less wonder still, they should so heartily join with the Manufacturers of *London* to seek Relief where it was only to be had.

As for *Canterbury*, the Misery of the People at the Time I speak of, was scarce to be credited, their Manufacture was intirely lost and given up, the Manufacturers fled from their Habitations in such Multitudes, that at the Time the *Prohibition Act* passed, that famous

City was reduced from *near a Thousand*, to *about Fifty Looms*.

The Counties before-mention'd, depending chiefly upon *London* and *Norwich*, for buying up their *Tarn*, bore an equal Share in the Common Calamity, were left without Employment, some turning themselves to new Ways of getting their Bread, others seeking for it in Foreign Countries, leaving their Wives and Children to the Parishes; by which Means we were not only strip'd of the Profitable Labour of many thousand Hands, *the least of which is of more Value to this Nation than all the Manufactured Silks of India, China and Persia*, but were forced to convey both our *Art and our Hands* to Foreign Countries, unhappily teaching them to fight us at our own Weapons, and to be Masters of *all our Mystery, and all our Trade at the same Time*. And of what Consequence this might have been to *Great Britain*, woful Experience would before this have taught us all, had not the Legislative Power intervened, and prevented us by *this happy, seasonable and useful Act*.

Let us now take a View of the present State and Condition of Trade in the Places and Counties aforementioned, that were thus Sunk, Deserted and Depopulated by these *Indian Manufactures*.

And

And tho' it must be own'd that the Space of *Eighteen Months* given by the Act to the Dealers in those Commodities, to dispose of the vast Quantities of them which were then in the Nation, together with the Influence of the Companies, and the Bent of all Sorts and Degrees of People towards these Goods, did necessarily suspend for some Time the Design and Influence of this Law ; yet, God be thanked, the Time is now come, when all Men that do not shut their Eyes, both see and feel the Benefit and Advantage of it. It cannot be expected that any Thing in the World can restore the Manufactures of *Great Britain* to their full Advantage and Height, so long as the War continues ; and we must be all content to submit to the Common Inconveniencies, till Peace be restored to *Europe*. But as far as our present Circumstances will admit, this seasonable Act has relieved us ; and I dare adventure to say, effectually too, as plainly appears in the following Instances.

In *London*, the Maker has a Market for his Goods, Artists and Work-men are return'd from the Places of their Dispersion, and find a full Employment for all their Hands ; the empty Streets and Houses are again Inhabited, and higher Rents paid for them than before. Several New Species of Manufactures set up, and every Day increasing and improving upon our Hands ; a great Part of which are Exported to our Neighbours, and as much in Vogue with them as they are in

Fashion with us : And I doubt not, but the Export of these Goods will be much higher yet, if we continue the general Use and Fashion of them at Home ; for it must always be noted, *That Fashions generally reach as far as the Honour and Reputation of a Nation Influenceth*, of which we have too pregnant an Instance in a Neighbouring Country.

*Norwich* gets up again apace ; they have a Market for their Goods, and Employment for their Hands, and their Circumstance being the same, it fares with them just as it does with *London*. *They sell, and Thanks be to God and our Legislators, they are risen together.*

The Case must needs be the same also with Respect to the several Counties, whose Employment depends upon *London* and *Norwich*, as before was noted ; so that there needs nothing more to be Remarked in Relation to them, then that *their Affairs are Restored and Retrieved in an exact Proportion to that of those Two great Marts.*

As for *Canterbury*, the Influence of this Act is more visibly seen there, than in any Place in the Nation. *That City was even become Desolate ; they are now return'd to their Homes*, as as before they left them, in *Shoals and Companies*. Their Houses and their Bellies are full. They rather want Hands then Work ; and  
there

*there is at this Day neither Complaint nor Decay amongst them for lack of Employment.*

We ought now to consider this Law as it Effects the Nation in general, *in its Merchandizes, Manufactures and Lands.* But I must be very short in these Particulars. And I think I need take Notice of the *Turky and Italian Merchants* only, under the first Head; who like all other Exporters, *cannot possibly carry their Trade farther than the Vend of their Imports will Support.* And I take it to be *Demonstration* that these Gentlemen must long since have laid down the greatest Part of their Business, if this Law had not interven'd. Our Silken Manufacture at Home was both supplanted and supplied by *Indian Goods.* Upon which Account we could have no Demand or Occasion for Raw Silks from *Turky and Italy*, and setting that Commodity aside, there are no other Effects in those Countries, sufficient to carry on a Valuable Trade, that can be disposed of in *Great Britain.* So that we are intirely indebted to this Act for the most, both of our Exports and Imports, to and from those Places; the Advantage and Profit of which redounds to the Manufacturer as well as to the Merchant; so that we are at once beholding to this Law, under the present Head of our Consideration, for the Circulation of our Money, the Preservation of our Commerce, and the Employment of our People. But there are other Advantages that attend this Act,

Act, which the People of *Leeds, Halifax, Wakefield, Beedal*, and other Places in *Yorkshire* partake of; where New Manufactures are set up for *Taru*, great Quantities of which are sent every Week to *London* and *Norwich*, and are there Manufactured. Many other Places likewise in *Great Britain* have begun other Manufactures, which are like to prove more or less Profitable, according to the Skill of the Directors; all Hands here find Work. There is no want in these Places of publick Work-Houses for the Willing Labourer of any Sex, Age or Condition.

It would be wasting of Time to shew that that this Law is of great Advantage to the Landed Men of the Nation. I am perswaded there is not one Gentleman of an Estate in it, that is not thoroughly convinced of the Truth of the Assertion. But that nothing may pass *Gratius dictum*, let it only be consider'd, That this Island can neither increase nor support its Riches, but by Trade and Commerce. This is the Life and Blood of the Nation, which as from the Heart, disperseth and communicates Vigour and Influence to the Whole, and every Branch and Member of it. And so far as this Law has retriev'd, reviv'd and improv'd our Manufactures, so far as it has enabled us to continue and increase our Profitable Exports, and the Produce of them; so far as it has recalled our Exiles, and strengthen'd our Hands, so far

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it has advantaged our Lands, increased our Rents, and enabled the Tenants to pay both the QUEEN and the Landlord. I hope there is now enough said, and nothing said but Matter of Fact, to support and establish my first Position concerning the Usefulness and Value of this happy Law; and there is nothing left under this Head, but to return our just Acknowledgments to those Worthy Patriots, who received so kindly *the Application of the Distressed*; apprehended so clearly *the Cause of their Misery*; relieved so seasonably *a sinking People*, and establish'd so firmly *this glorious Law*. May the Blessings of Heaven attend them and their Posterity, and be as lasting as the happy Effects of this Act.

It is time now to establish the second Position. And the very repeating of it, will I hope make the Talk easie enough. It runs thus.

2. We are not in any Danger of losing this Act, that is to say, it is not like to be Repeal'd: But on the contrary, will stand firm and unshaken to future Ages, notwithstanding the Designs and Attempts of its Adversaries.

I. And first I think this Act will stand by reason of its own intrinsic Worth and Value.

II. Because its Enemies are few.

III. Be-

III. Because they who shall attempt to Repeal it, may find the Task more Difficult then they are aware of.

IV. Because of the Misery and Desolation the Repealing it would occasion.

1. As to the first Reason why the Act should stand, I need not say any Thing here ; the whole foregoing Discourse, being a Demonstration of its Worth, Value and Usefulness to this Nation.

2. And as to the second Reason, unless the Ladies be reckon'd in the Number, I believe the Assertion is actually and literally true. *Few doubtless they are, if compared with the Number or Value of those for whose sake the Bill was Enacted; I speak Politically, for by the latter, I mean not only the Manufactures, but the whole Nation.* After all, I am more at a loss to know who are Enemies to this Law, then in concern for their Numbers. I know the Cause of Fear, were it freely own'd, can proceed from nothing but *the Strength and Influence of the Companies.* But I must crave leave to say, that People may fear where no Fear is, and fancy they are in Danger, when no body designs to hurt them; and excepting some Rumors about the Town, perhaps industriously spread Abroad, to try the Temper of the People ; I have good reason to believe *this to be the true State of the Matter.*

The

The *East-India* Companies are made up of the Wealthiest Merchants and Gentry of the Nation, who have large Estates, and great Stakes in the Government : I hope most of them, I am sure some of them, have the Welfare and Prosperity of their Country more at Heart than to to Wish, much less to Endeavour *the Repealing of this Act* ; and it is my real Opinion, that there is no such Design on Foot, *I cannot think so hardly* of these Gentlemen, and there can be no Danger from any other Quarter. But supposing, not allowing the worst of the Case, I must still add,

3. Even the united Company it self, Strong and Potent as it is, might, and I hope, would miscarry in the Attempt. The Matter in contest would then be, *Whether the Nation should sink that the Company might rise ? Whether the Staple Manufactures of Great Britain should be once more destroyed, to exalt the tempting Excesses of India, China and Persia ? Whether our best Artists should make a Second Experiment to instruct our Neighbours in our Miseries and Improvements, that we may starve more Luxuriously in Indian-Habits ? Whether we should Empty our selves of our Numbers and Strength to make more room for prohibited Goods ? And whether the whole must be Impoverish'd to Enrich a few ?* If these Things can be digested, such an Attempt might possibly prevail. But in the mean time, I think we are safe enough ; and I think we are  
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so, because we are safe in the Honour and Justice of our Legislators. Those that made this Law have Power to preserve it ; and the Value of it is too precious to part with for such Gygaws as we must have in Exchange for it ; especially when by losing it, we intail upon the Nation such a Deluge of Miseries as are hinted above. Not that all the Misfortunes that would come upon us are there enumerated ; there are others yet behind that would effectually do our Business, and render us as compleatly miserable as our Grand Enemy could wish, and our own Folly deserve. Of these I will only mention Three, as so many standing Arguments for my Fourth Reason why this Act will not be Repealed, viz. Because of the Misery and Desolation it would occasion.

4. These Three Misfortunes are the carrying out of all our Bullion. The suddenness of the Blow, and the probable Consequences of it.

It cannot be denyed that the present Trade to India, under all its Restrictions, requires an Export of Bullion much greater, not only than the Nation can spare, but indeed than it possesseth. Now if this Act were Repealed, it must be in favour of the Companies, and on purpose to enlarge their Trade and Dealing with those Countries. This must of course require a greater Export of Bullion, which as our Case stands, can be no otherwise supplied but from the Coin, which

which single Point considered, is of the last Consequence to this Nation, and needs no Application. I suppose every Body will readily grant, That the Companies Traded to *India* much higher for the Seven Years preceding the Act, than in the Seven Years that followed it; the Consequence of which necessarily was, *That in the former Seven Years they carried out several Hundred Thousand Pounds per Annum in Bullion, more than in the latter.* Which Sum, whatever it be, is saved to us purely by force of this Act.

The suddenness of the Blow is a stunning Article. The Manufacturers Livelyhood was not heretofore snatched from them at one Stroke, as it would be in this Case; they were enured to Want, and learned to Starve by degrees; but by Repealing this Act, *Poverty would come upon them like an armed Man; suddenly, inevitably, and there would be none to help.* And what Perplexity, what Misery, what Desolation; nay, what Agitations and Convulsions all this might occasion, is much fitter for private Reflection, than publick Representation. I love not to mention *the beginnings of such Woer,* and tremble to think *how they would End.*

Since therefore there is so much Good already procured by this Law, and so much more to be expected; since such Misery must needs attend the Repeal of it, and perhaps more than is  
fit

fit to be suggested. Why should it be Imagined, much less Credited, That the Thing can be effected, or ever will be attempted ? 'Tis too hard and injurious a Thought *upon the Companies* ; and 'tis a dishonourable and unworthy Reflection *upon the Government*. It will not, it never can be ; 'tis raving and phrensie to suppose it, because it would be madness, and a judicial Desertion to Design it ; 'tis putting an End to the War *the shortest Way*. In short, 'tis French Slavery, and Wooden Shooes all over. I will only add, That *so long as we are Blest with our present Constitution, and a Brittish Parliament ; so long I verily believe, this Act will stand firm and unshaken* ; that is, I hope and trust, so long as the Sun and Moon endureth.

Thus I have done with the main part of your Letter ; there is nothing now behind but to Consider the Four Arguments, for the setting aside this Bill, which you say you find so often in some Peoples Mouths. In Truth, *these Arguments* as you are pleased to call them, are not only so *Weak, but so Provoking*, that I scarce know with what Language to treat them ; but because you request it, I will set them down, and endeavour to Expose them as they well deserve.

*Object. 1.* It seems, the Exports of our Woollen Manufactures are lessened since this Act was made.

2. Our

2. Our Imports of Wrought Silk from our *European* Neighbours are increased.

3. By Repealing this Act, it is not designed to take away the Employment of the People, but only to change the *Prohibition* into an *Imposition*.

4. The Necessities of the Nation require this to be done, to raise a **FUND** for the **W.A.R.**

1. The first of these Arguments is deceitfully laid down, and would conclude nothing, supposing it to be true. To convince you of this, I would only desire you to consider what Part of our Manufactures are less Exported then heretofore. If this be affirmed of our Fine Manufactures made of Wool, and Silk and Wool, *it is a Mistake in Fact*; for there never was a Time when so many of these, which directly oppose the *Indian* Goods, were Exported to *HOLLAND*, *HAMBURGH* and *PORTUGAL*, as of late Years. And there is a plain Reason for the Encrease of these Exports, to wit, the small Quantity of prohibited Manufactures brought into *GREAT BRITAIN*, since that Act commenced: For since that Time, our own Fine Manufactures have supplied their Place both at Home and Abroad. And if it be af-

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firmed in respect only of our Courser Wool-  
lens; all it will conclude is, that we suffer  
much in this Article, for want of **TRADE**  
with the *Spanish* Dominions, which no body  
will deny: But then this Misfortune is not  
to be imputed to the *Prohibition Act*, but to  
the House of *BOURBON*'s seizing of, and  
hindring our **TRADE** to those Countries.

2. As to the second Argument, 'tis wholly  
deny'd. Men may affirm what they please.  
But I insist upon it, and the Dealers in Fo-  
reign Silks know it to be true; That from  
the Year One Thousand Six Hundred and  
Sixty there never was so little of this Manu-  
facture imported into *GREAT BRITAIN*,  
as within these Six Years last past; and a  
great Part even of this too, is run in upon  
us by the Smugler and unfair Trader, with-  
out paying the Customs. The *Brittish* Ma-  
nufacturer pays in our own Markets, Ten or  
Fifteen Pound *per Cent.* more for Raw Silk  
than the *Dutch* do, by reason the latter are  
allowed to draw back the Customs. But this  
Mischief cannot be imputed to any Deficien-  
cy in the *Prohibition Act*, but to the want of  
due Care in paying the Customs upon the  
Imports of these Goods back again, and the  
Practises of the unfair Dealer.

3. The

3. The third Argument is both Deceitful and False, by pretending to insinuate, that a high Duty upon *Indian* Goods would secure the Manufacture at Home. It is something strange that the Manufacturer should be secured by that which destroys the Manufacture, and that a Weaver in *Spittle-fields* should thrive the better, because *Indian* Silks are Sold the Dearer. Alas it is not the Rate or Price, but the Quantity of these Goods that effects the Profit of the Importer, and the Ruin of the Manufacturer. And is it possible, that an *Imposition* can prevent great Quantities from coming in? It is not pretended, on the contrary, an *Imposition* is laid on purpose that they might be brought in. *Nothing can keep them out but a Prohibition; and nothing can let them in but an Imposition.* Besides, Experience has taught us, that a high Duty is a Bait to some Men, that never fails to tempt them to defraud the Government, and prejudice the Manufacturer and fair Dealer. And indeed the Fraud is but too Practicable, by pretending to Export them, and then running them in again; so that whatever Price is paid by the Buyer for the Goods that have fairly paid the High Duty; to be sure these that are Run may be afforded Cheap enough, entirely to destroy the Poor Remnant of *British* Manufacture, the other would leave us. Besides, were these Commodities such as could

not easily be Run, and did they come from Countries that took off Proportionable Quantities of our own Produce in Exchange for them; it were yet to be consider'd what Duty ought to be laid on them, to bring them upon a Level with our own Manufactures; for this must be done before the Manufacture at Home can be secured. Now the Value of the Labour of the People of *India* bearing no greater Proportion to ours, then One does to Six; it follow, that to effect this Security, no less Imposition can be laid on *East-India* Goods than Five Hundred Pound *per Cent.* as was done in the CASE of the *East-India* Sugars, to secure the Produce of our *American* Colonies, which had the designed Effect, and amounted to a Prohibition; for since the Passing of that ACT, none of those Sugars have been consumed in *Great Britain*. I do not say, were this Imposition laid on, that the *Brittish* Manufactures could be Secure; and it is plain, no Imposition can make them so; for such is the Fondness of all Sorts of People for these Goods, that vast Quantities of them would go off, let the Price be what it will. Nor does it at all concern the Manufacturer, at what Rate these Goods are Sold, it being the Quantity, and the Opposition, and not the Price that destroys us. And this Destruction of our Manufactures would still be more certain, by the Running of the Goods,

Goods, and the Practise of Smuglers and unfair Dealers, as before was noted.

4. The fourth Argument is a Home one indeed ; and if it be true, which God forbid, 'tis the best News the *French* King ever heard since his Head was crown'd, and the worst that ever befel this Nation. But pray, Sir, who are the Men that are so Bold as to assert, *That the Necessities of the Nation require this to be done, to raise a Fund for the War?* That is to say, that we are so Exhausted, that a Yearly Fund of 100000 l. cannot be found out without Repealing this Act. I cannot forbear to think that such Notions as these, and so studiously advanced, have a very evil Tendency in them, and are meant to dispirit and discourage the People, to make them weary and dissatisfied with the Just and Necessary Measures we are engaged in, and the Managers of the War ; to Expose the Nakedness of the Land to its Enemies, and to Weaken both the Hearts and Hands of its Friends. *Ways and Means are Parliamentary Affairs* ; and it is fit the Methods of raising Money should be left to those whose Province it is to supply Her Majesty's Just Occasions, and to take Care of the Subject. But if any Regard is to be had to the Assertion above, it would render these Two Things Incompatible ; for if no Money can be raised without Repealing the *Prohibition Act*, either the Money must be wanted, or the Nation must be ruined ;

ruined; by either of which Accidents, the Common Cause is given up. This is the *Dilemma* these Gentlemen would bring us into; because this is the Condition they would have it believed we are in. I have not Patience to dwell any longer on this Subject; but hope I may say with good Assurance that this War may and will be carry'd on, and I hope effectually too, without running any great Risque to the Nation; much more without exposing our Selves and Posterity to utter Ruine, to Establish a Fund for One Hundred Thousand Pounds *per Annum*.

I am Sir,

*Your Humble Servant.*

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